

JJCF Interim Report

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I have been working at Better Block in Dallas, TX for a month now, and I already don't want to leave. I have learned a lot about urban design and the unique challenges that come with trying to make established cities more livable. The Better Block team (there are seven of us) has been great to work with and has taught me a lot. As I have learned more about the local community, I have gained greater perspective into how to effectively navigate the barriers that come up when you are designing for the public realm.

I have always been passionate about design and improving lives, but I never really knew that those two things could be one in the same until coming to work at Better Block. It has been empowering to be able to use my design background and apply it to improving the built environment. I have done design work in the social sphere before, but never on the city scale. I have seen how detrimental poorly designed public space can be, but I have also seen the positive impact that well-deigned spaces can have on everyone.

So far, I have been mostly doing graphic design work for various different projects that we are working on at Better Block. This has allowed me to be involved in many different projects both in Dallas, and all over the US. I started with looking at the existing materials that we have, and then worked on how we can better represent ourselves. I also designed materials



for Seed Preschool, an interactive class about gardening for children that is currently taking place at Better Block.

We also host events at Better Block to help foster community in Oak Cliff, where our office is. So far we have had a concert, snow cones, and two outdoor movies. These events give me a nice change to engage with and learn about the community. In my free time, I have been enjoying discovering Dallas, a city unlike any place that I have lived before.

Another project that I got to work on was designing a Better Block pop-up event. One of the services that Better Block offers is designing pop-up urban design projects in cities all across the US and the world. We work with community partners to reimagine their downtown area and transform it into a space that livable and works for people. Typically, we design short pop-up experiments that give the community a sense of how public life can be improved through transformation of the built world. These events take a downtown area, and for a weekend, transform it using easily accessible methods such as using CNC street furniture, duct tape, and temporary paint.



Working based off the needs and suggestions of the local community, I designed a Better Block for Kenmore, Ohio. This involved looking at the downtown area in its current configuration, and creating a plan that transformed the space using available materials. The experience of designing something that will actually be built and improve lives was both a lot of responsibility, but also an exciting challenge. When the event happens, the community can take what they have learned to implement some of the changes on a more permanent level. I also designed a logo for an ongoing Better Block project in Ottumwa.

Later this month, I will be traveling to Barberton, Ohio to assist with a Better Block event. I am looking forward helping transform the space by building the street furniture and doing other set-up. I also am excited to see the event in person, and watch how a pop-up project can change public life and lead to permanent improvements.

One project that I am particularly excited about is the Fabhouse. The Fabhouse, which is still in its planning stage, is a project to build a tiny home using the fabrication resources we have on hand. One of Better Block's missions is to create open-source designs that anyone can build. We have created Wikiblock, a site with downloadable plans for street furniture that anyone can build. The idea that we can make these designs available to anyone who wants to improve their public space. All they need is some time at a maker space.

Under this principle, we are creating a tiny home using a CNC router. We will make the plans for the house available online so that anyone can download them and build the house themselves. We are also planning to work with local craftspeople to make the house a community effort. On top of that, we are aiming to assemble the house in 18 hours. So far, I have worked on designing a logo for the Fabhouse and given input on the design and the planning for the project. Unfortunately, the final build of the house will take place after I leave, but it is exciting to be involved in the process. The house will provide a cheaper DIY option for someone who is in need of housing.

I can't believe that I am already half way through my time here. I have learned so much, but there is also so much more that I still want to learn. I am very appreciative of the support I have received from JJCF, as it has allowed me to do this life-changing internship. I have been able to involve myself in many facets of the design work that takes place at Better Block, and look forward to doing even more in my last month.

